United Nations

A/C.2/65/SR.7

General Assembly
Sixty-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
20 October 2010

Original: English

## Second Committee

**Summary record of the 7th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 8 October 2010, at 10 a.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Ochir ..... (Mongolia)

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Agenda item 118: Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

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10-57331 (E)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 118: Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly**

1. **The Chairperson** drew attention to a letter dated 29 September 2010, addressed to all permanent missions and permanent observers, transmitting a non-paper entitled "Improving the methods of work of the Second Committee", prepared by the Chairperson and the Bureau to provide useful references and facilitate discussion, containing in particular a message from the Bureau of the sixty-fourth session. Under the heading entitled "The way forward", three categories of suggestions had been made: mandated activity; issues for quick action containing elements that could be agreed upon; and longer-term issues that might require facilitation efforts. Furthermore, the Bureau hoped that the Committee could agree to the four elements contained under the heading "Issues for quick action", namely: time limits and respecting speakers' lists; deadlines for submission of draft proposals; featured guest speakers, panel discussions and expert inputs; and making the consideration of working methods a regular feature. The topic of working methods of the Committee could be regularly considered under the existing item, entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly".

2. **Mr. Alyemany** (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group did not favour initiatives that could affect the prominence of the Second Committee vis-à-vis the other Main Committees. Areas where there was room for improving working methods should be identified and internal steps taken to make the Committee's work more efficient. However, it was not necessary, as suggested in the non-paper, to make recommendations to the General Assembly. It was important to hold discussions on each agenda item in order to enable all delegations to present their views and priorities on specific topics and to give depth to the resolutions adopted. The Group was open to improving the format of the debate in order to make it more effective, dynamic and interactive, in particular by revisiting time limits for statements and encouraging better compliance with time limits.

3. The Group of 77 and China was traditionally responsible for the submission of most draft resolutions. The suggestion that its consultations should be held outside the framework of the Committee would only further complicate an already burdensome process. The suggestion that the Group should present less detailed texts would also impinge upon its right to decide on the contents of texts. Limiting the length of draft proposals seemed impractical. Similar calls should be made to partners when presenting their counter-proposals, as many detailed texts often came from their side. Deadlines for the submission of draft proposals, whose preparation was time-consuming, should be flexible. However, deadlines could be made consonant with the complexity of the issues, allowing more consultation time for more complex issues.

4. The Group was studying other means of rationalization, such as the biennial or triennial treatment of items. That exercise should proceed carefully, where appropriate, based on clear reasons and the willingness of delegations to accept proposed changes, and should not be detrimental to the right of all Member States to put forward proposals for the introduction of new agenda items or new draft resolutions.

5. While the Group agreed to continue organizing panel discussions and other interactive events as part of the Committee's work, they should not be too numerous; topics should be selected on the basis of Bureau recommendations, in consultation with Member States, and should be relevant to the Committee's work. Interactive discussions, which sometimes were not conducive to a focused exchange of views on the topic at hand, should not replace debate per agenda item. In selecting keynote speakers, an appropriate balance was needed between experts from the North and the South from different intellectual backgrounds.

6. It was not necessary to decide on a new agenda item to consider the working methods of the Committee. As noted in the non-paper, that issue could be considered under the existing agenda item, entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly". Improving the Committee's methods of work, while important, did not need to be discussed on a yearly basis.

7. The Group would appreciate clarification of the issue raised under the subheading "Mandated activity", in the light of General Assembly resolution 64/301. It was the prerogative of each Committee to present proposals on that issue. A lengthy parallel process of negotiation on rationalization of the agenda would only

contribute to further delays, further overburdening the Committee's agenda.

8. **Mr. de Bassompierre** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the Second Committee was an important universal forum for the discussion of economic, social and environmental issues, whose work should be made even more effective, relevant and efficient. Experience of past sessions had shown that missing deadlines, both to introduce resolutions and to finalize negotiations on them, could seriously hinder the Committee's work. Parallel processes outside of the Committee and the repetition of debates already held in the Economic and Social Council had often created duplications and hindered the efficient use of the Committee's time. The Committee could therefore do better. Even limited changes could make an important difference to the quality of its work.

9. The European Union welcomed the suggestions contained in the non-paper as steps in the right direction and would support measures that could have an immediate positive impact during the current session. In particular, full compliance with existing rules and adequate follow-up of General Assembly recommendations, notably those in resolution 64/301, would already constitute an important step forward. The European Union would also consider suggestions regarding practices for the submission of proposals with a view to meeting deadlines, such as a one-time deadline for the submission of all drafts or giving clear guidelines to facilitators on what to do if negotiations were behind schedule. Resolutions not agreed on time could be transmitted to the following session or made procedural. More focused proposals would also improve the quality of the Committee's work.

10. The Committee's agenda could be reviewed in terms of relevance of the topics discussed in order to determine whether any items could be treated on a biennial or triennial basis, or even deleted, as recommended in resolution 64/301. In that connection, careful consideration should be given to avoiding overlaps and duplication in the division of labour between the Committee and the Economic and Social Council. That suggestion was particularly timely in view of the review process of resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council.

11. The European Union welcomed the steps taken by the Bureau to reduce the number of special events and would also welcome discussion of some of the proposals contained under point 2 of the non-paper, such as merging or clustering debates around specific themes.

12. **Mr. Park** In-kook (Republic of Korea) said that the positive momentum gathered for making the Committee's work more efficient should be maintained. The non-paper provided a good basis for further discussion. The Committee should revisit the issue of duplication between the general debate and the debate on each agenda item. The Organization held high-level meetings almost yearly on issues within the Committee's purview. Statements in the general debate tended to repeat the statements made at those high-level meetings. The Committee should thus reconsider whether its general debate had any real added value.

13. For its part, the Republic of Korea had decided to engage actively in the debate under each agenda item rather than repeat in the Committee the statement previously made at the recent High-level Plenary Meeting. Commendably, some countries had been trying to contribute to streamlining the Committee's work by refraining from delivering duplicative statements.

14. Setting deadlines was a daunting task. At the previous session, having several deadlines for the submission of resolutions had proven unworkable. Delegations should pay close attention to observing deadlines, since the Committee's cycle for the submission of resolutions was hectic and daunting compared to the other Main Committees. Following the Economic and Social Council during the summer, one or more high-level meetings might usually be held. After finishing those meetings, the experts were finally able to turn to Second Committee matters. It was a tight schedule for a group to prepare more than 40 resolutions. There was therefore a need for a flexible range of options, such as submitting less detailed texts, as mentioned in the non-paper. The non-paper also contained other ideas worth discussing, such as rationalizing agenda items, introducing innovative methods and reducing time for each intervention.

15. **Mr. Bachmann** (Switzerland) said that the Committee was a crucial forum for the discussion of

social and economic matters and the welcome discussion on its working methods would make it even more relevant. Switzerland fully supported stricter rules for the submission of draft resolutions. Proposals should not be submitted after set deadlines. However, a single deadline was not useful. The Group of 77 and China, and other delegations, might not be in a position to submit all proposals at once, and a single deadline could lead to a concomitant start of many negotiations, causing capacity constraints, particularly for small delegations, and logistical difficulties for conference services. Thus, multiple deadlines should be kept but made mandatory and realistic.

16. While many resolutions overlapped in substance, that was unavoidable since the issues were interlinked. However, there was scope for rationalizing the Committee's agenda by eliminating some sub-items, striving for more substantial complementarity when drafting and negotiating resolutions so that each text would have a clear comparative advantage, and aiming for more streamlined and focused texts, which would add to their prominence and political relevance. In that regard, many resolutions could be enhanced by considering them less frequently, such as the resolution entitled "Towards global partnerships", which was only negotiated every other year. Complementarity between the General Assembly and its Second Committee should be enhanced. That discussion should take place in the context of resolution 61/16.

17. An example of complementarity was the quadrennial comprehensive policy review: the General Assembly gave overall guidance to the United Nations development system every fourth year, while the Economic and Social Council discussed the implementation of that policy review yearly. Complementarity between the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly plenary should be enhanced in the area of humanitarian affairs, with the latter focusing on policy issues and the former predominantly on operational matters.

18. In the Committee, the added value of the general debate, as compared with the debate on specific items, was not clear. The general debate absorbed considerable time and was not legislatively mandated. Quality, focus and efficiency of discussions could be improved by forgoing the general debate. Switzerland also supported reducing the time of speeches and ensuring due respect for speakers' lists. Rationalization of the Committee's work could be discussed under the item entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly".

19. **Ms. Gaeumann** (Liechtenstein) said that the Committee's work during the previous session had been substantially delayed by late submission of proposals, thus delaying the conclusion of negotiations. The current deadline for the submission of proposals was one day after the expected conclusion of debate on the respective item, but deadlines were frequently ignored. Her country had no strong view on whether there should be one or several deadlines but felt that deadlines issued by the Bureau must be respected and that no draft should be accepted after the agreed deadline. The time spent on the general debate could be used more efficiently. It could be replaced by a shorter and more focused interactive discussion on issues before the Committee. The Committee could also benefit from an institutionalized discussion on its working methods.

20. **Mr. González Segura** (Mexico) said that the Committee's methods of work should enable it effectively to pursue the relevant issues on the global agenda. Accordingly, Mexico supported making debates more interactive. However, for his country, as for many others, the General Assembly, and especially the Second Committee, provided an opportunity to approach issues from a different perspective. While it was desirable to impart greater dynamism to debates, it was important that every delegation should be able to speak on issues relevant to it. He proposed that, following each segment of the debate, a Chairperson's summary should be prepared. That document could serve to inform national authorities and the public about the thrust of the debates, helping to place the General Assembly and the Committee in the international discussion without compromising anyone's position in the negotiations.

21. In Mexico's view, matters such as the details of interactive debates and parallel events or time allowed to speakers were the responsibility of the Bureau and appropriate adjustments could be made under the Bureau's responsibility. He proposed that, in the discussion of specific items, the Committee should consider direct and substantive participation by agencies of the United Nations system dealing with the items under discussion. Participation by scholars was informative but such presentations should be specifically linked to the items under discussion. If items on the Committee's agenda could be eliminated,

that would of course lighten the Committee's workload; however, that was a delicate exercise to be conducted on a case-by-case basis.

22. Regarding duplication of the items addressed by the Committee and the Economic and Social Council, Mexico favoured considering the different characteristics and advantages of the two forums and their inertias, and emphasizing the more useful characteristics. An example was the enhanced follow-up mechanism on financing for development, in which both the Committee and the Economic and Social Council played a specific role. Similar exercises could be useful with other items shared by the two bodies.

23. Experience of recent years had shown that it was important for the Committee to comply fully with the deadlines in its programme of work, especially regarding the submission of draft resolutions. However, deadlines should be realistic, taking into account the difficulties of presenting drafts. Some submission deadlines would arrive the following week and he urged delegations to make timely submissions.

24. While he was confident that ways would be found to improve the dynamic of the Committee's work, the discussion should be primarily informal, avoiding unwieldy procedural debate that would distract the Committee from addressing substantive items.

25. **Ms. Hay** (New Zealand), speaking on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand (CANZ), said that the three recent high-level events on the MDGs, the Mauritius Strategy and biodiversity attested to the importance of the issues addressed by the Committee, which must ensure that its work was relevant and action-oriented by prioritizing and focusing its efforts. The structure of the debate in the Committee should be reviewed. Its general debate often duplicated statements made in the General Assembly's general debate and in high-level events. CANZ seldom intervened in the Committee's general debate, preferring to make interventions on the cluster items, and would support reducing its length as much as possible.

26. Negotiations should begin and conclude on time. Deadlines set by the Bureau for the submission of resolutions should be observed. Texts and proposals should be streamlined, avoiding duplication and overlap both within the Committee's resolutions and with those negotiated elsewhere, including in the Economic and Social Council, which should exercise similar discipline. In that connection, careful consideration should be given to improving the division of labour between the Committee and the Economic and Social Council, revising the frequency of consideration of agenda items, and examining the need for certain items to be continued. Resolutions considered less often could have more prominence than those considered yearly. The Secretariat should also be encouraged to make better use of innovative technologies such as "QuickPlace" in disseminating draft proposals and other documents such as speakers' lists.

27. Having just emerged from three high-level events, the Committee should seek to build on their outcomes rather than renegotiate them. Similarly, other relevant meetings on issues before the Committee would shortly take place. CANZ was confident that the desired outcome of a more efficient and effective Committee could be achieved.

28. **Mr. Glucksman** (United States of America) said that there was a general desire to make the Committee's work more efficient and productive. He respected the prerogative of every Member State to present a resolution and to be heard. He hoped that, through a more interactive discussion, some of the ideas enjoying broad consensus could be concretized.

29. His country would welcome any proposal to help ensure the more timely submission of resolutions. However, rather than negative incentives such as deadlines, it would be desirable to introduce positive incentives to encourage timeliness. Regarding the view that deadlines should be flexible, his delegation was concerned that, by providing more time for the preparation of draft resolutions, less time would be left at the end of the negotiating process to conclude them, particularly the more complex ones.

30. He welcomed efforts to streamline the discussion process, possibly by combining resolutions covering related topics within specific clusters, which would likely produce better, more substantive resolutions, as well as efforts to reduce the frequency of consideration of some resolutions. If others agreed, the United States could support a proposal to limit remarks to a single omnibus general statement. The grouping of items could be a useful first step. The following week, as a test, his delegation would not make separate remarks on macroeconomic and development issues, such as the international financial system and external debt, but

would instead combine them with remarks on financing for development and trade and deliver those remarks during the discussion of financing for development.

31. His delegation favoured further exploring the placing of time limits on the general debate, limiting the number of panel discussions, holding more interactive and dynamic debates, and striking a balance between the North and the South and between academic and United Nations experts, as suggested by the Group of 77 and China.

32. His delegation also supported the suggestion of Mexico that a Chairperson's summary of debates should be used to help delegations expedite reporting to their capitals and to facilitate their discussions, which might provide more time for negotiations.

33. **Mr. Vasiliev** (Russian Federation) said that discussion on methods of work and streamlining the Committee's agenda had begun some 10 years previously and it was to be hoped that a firm foundation had been established with a view to ultimately taking decisions that would enhance the Committee's work. His delegation shared most of the views expressed by previous speakers, particularly the Group of 77 and China, which had correctly pointed out that any decision would need to be based on painstaking analysis, not merely political rhetoric.

34. The status of the Committee as an important governmental platform for the discussion and adoption of decisions on topical issues of global development must be maintained. His delegation favoured maintaining general debates, which afforded the chance to make important political comments and formed the basis for developing concrete programmes by assessing and evaluating all the overlapping processes in the world economy, the interdependence of markets and crisis phenomena.

35. He supported the need to streamline the Committee's agenda, a theme recently discussed in the context of financial development, with agreement on a resolution on new modalities and strengthening of future work. His delegation had put forward a proposal to achieve a more rational approach to macroeconomic issues which had not appeared in the final resolution but could still be usefully taken up; he urged delegations to carefully consider and support it.

36. The overlapping of work between the Committee and the Economic and Social Council should not be over-dramatized. The Council had a specific mandate and tasks as a constituent organ of the United Nations and the two bodies discussed issues in different formats. However, there was a need for greater harmonization.

37. His delegation supported achieving greater interactivity and momentum in the Committee's work. Experts in various fields could make useful contributions. However, the Committee should maintain the intergovernmental nature of its work and members should have the opportunity to express official positions on key issues. Since panel discussions did not always promote that aim, his delegation agreed with the view that they should be limited.

38. His delegation was prepared to discuss in greater detail deadlines for the submission of resolutions. A single deadline was not necessarily the best option. While the decision would depend on delegations themselves, the deadlines established in advance by the Bureau should be observed.

39. His delegation took note of the view of the Group of 77 and China that the time was perhaps not yet ripe for specific decisions. If the Committee intended to adopt specific decisions, his delegation favoured holding specific discussion on such decisions in a more informal setting.

40. **Mr. Torrington** (Guyana) said that there was scope to improve the Committee's working methods, and that discussions on such improvements should be based on a good understanding of the Committee's substantive work. It was important to recall that, by virtue of Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Organization was entrusted with a role in resolving global economic and financial issues. That endeavour devolved upon the Second Committee, making it possible for all members to have a voice on such issues. For many countries, the Committee was the only forum where they had such a voice. Caution was therefore in order when modifying practices that had evolved over many years and embodied the experience and wisdom of those years. The Committee received the intellectual contributions of members in the sphere of development, crystallizing received knowledge on development and contextualizing and discussing development issues and challenges. Thus, what might appear to be duplication was often in fact consolidation of ideas in the development realm and

formulation of proactive approaches for advancing development practice. The general debate was a primary vehicle for achieving those objectives.

41. Making their own contributions to development issues remained vital to delegations. Some of the changes being suggested affected the best defining features of the Committee, such as the tradition of working by consensus. Although it was possible to set an arbitrary deadline such that resolutions submitted thereafter could not be negotiated, that might prove unhelpful and merely lead to the need to resort to voting. Abandoning the consensus tradition could thus be a setback in the development arena. Similarly, some had pointed to the need for the more timely submission of resolutions, suggesting that groups other than the Group of 77 and China should undertake the preparation of draft resolutions; however, that might in fact prove less efficient.

42. What was needed was a better management of the general debate and other debates. It was the specific responsibility of the Bureau to ensure compliance with agreed time limits. The Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly gave the Bureau ample scope to deal with some of the issues under discussion. Rule 114 provided that a committee might limit the time to be allowed to each speaker and the number of times each representative might speak on any question, further providing that a representative could be called to order without delay for exceeding the allotted time. An appropriate way should be established to remind delegations that the time limit was approaching. There was adequate precedent for doing so. The Bureau also had a responsibility to work proactively with delegations on difficulties that it could help to facilitate.

43. It did not appear likely that the Committee could negotiate which resolutions should be removed or discontinued, although there was room for looking more closely at biennial or triennial treatment. It might be helpful for delegations or groups with specific ideas to submit them to the main drafting group in advance. Through better understanding and trust, many differences that caused divisions could be resolved. It would be a very substantial contribution if the Bureau could find ways of building greater confidence.

44. The agenda item entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly" provided the appropriate context for improving the Committee's working methods and there was no need for an additional item. It was advisable for the discussion on methods of work to take place early in the session, as the current Bureau had done, and the current discussion was itself a good outcome which could be institutionalized.

45. **Mr. Islam** (Bangladesh) said that the general debate theoretically served as a preamble to the legal instruments embodied in resolutions. However, the values and views emanating from the general debate were not necessarily reflected in the resolutions.

46. It was being discussed whether the general debate should focus on specific issues. However, new issues were evolving every year. Thus, the general debate should remain unchanged. In previous years, it had been difficult to participate in all panel discussions, negotiations and other parallel activities, which should therefore be limited in number.

47. The Committee's essential task was to finalize and adopt resolutions, making them law under the United Nations paradigm. The preparation of some resolutions could be shared between the Group of 77 and China and other groups; however, once the Group of 77 and China was entrusted with a resolution, it should be given enough time and there should be no imposition regarding the contents, details and number of resolutions within the group.

48. His delegation supported the proposal of Mexico for a synopsis of the general debate to inform delegates on what had transpired in the debate and enable them to contribute positively to negotiations.

49. **Mr. Seth** (Director of the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination) said that the Committee had taken an important step by addressing its working methods at the beginning of its session. Through changing times and the changing focus of international affairs, the effort to maintain momentum in the Second Committee was important. He hoped that there would be another opportunity to look at the lessons learned from the current year's work.

50. Procedure was important because it had substantive implications. It was sometimes suggested that the Second Committee should follow the practices of other committees. However, in other committees, positions were often very well established and the work often led to voted resolutions. In the Second

Committee the agenda items were broadly and variously interconnected, which came through in the resolutions put forward, often containing paragraphs which were common to several resolutions. Some 95 to 98 per cent of the resolutions adopted by the Committee were adopted by consensus. That democratic and consensus-oriented approach was time-consuming, had its own dynamic and placed compulsions on the work of the Committee.

51. Although the Committee was serviced by foreign affairs ministries, the issues with which it dealt were often outside their direct remit. Discussions in the Committee therefore required expert inputs and extra time was needed to understand the complexities involved.

52. Regarding timeliness, several suggestions had been made on the length of statements and internal discipline. The value added in general debate statements was also linked to the quality of outcomes; Member States should consider whether any value was added by merely updating previous resolutions. Reducing the number of agenda items permitted each item to be discussed in greater depth; the Committee should consider how to strike a balance enabling all items to be considered in depth.

53. Regarding the duplication of work, he noted that the Economic and Social Council had been greatly streamlined. In the current year it had considered gender and development, the MDGs and development, aid effectiveness and policy coherence, coordination in public health, and the operationalization of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review — all items which were not currently before the Committee. Thus, there was complementarity rather than duplication.

54. A summary of the general debate along the lines suggested by Mexico was being prepared. Whether summaries could be extended to each agenda item, however, would depend on Secretariat resources, since the summary would need to be done very quickly in order to be meaningful.

55. Lastly, he pledged the Secretariat's support in achieving the goal of timely conclusion of the Committee's work and having a qualitative impact on its work.

56. **The Chairperson** said that, in the light of the statements delivered, the Bureau would hold consultations with a view to finding a way forward that would avoid prolonged, cumbersome negotiations. The great majority of speakers had supported retaining the general debate but there was a willingness to look into ways of improving its format and making it more interactive and dynamic.

57. Regarding the length of resolutions, the General Assembly had provided a mandate in resolution 58/126, calling for resolutions to be more concise, focused and action-oriented, especially by keeping preambular paragraphs to a minimum.

58. Regarding deadlines for the submission of resolutions, a major sticking-point in the Committee's work, consultations would continue with a view to having realistic deadlines that would be observed and would enable work to be finished as planned.

59. On the selection of keynote speakers for events and panel discussions, the Bureau was fully aware of the importance of having speakers from both the North and the South, ensuring a balance between different perspectives.

60. Other positive ideas had been offered, including positive incentives for timely submission and a summary of debates on clusters. The Bureau would take stock of the statements made and innovative ideas proposed and would return to the Committee with suggestions.

*The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.*